

# The Bahamian Spirit

An Interview with Audrey Oswell, President and Managing Director, Atlantis Paradise Island

**EDITORS' NOTE** Audrey Oswell took the helm of Atlantis Paradise Island in 2017 after having served as the resort's Chief Operating Officer and Chief Gaming Officer. She is the first woman to serve as President and Managing Director. Oswell is overseeing Atlantis' recovery from the impact of the pandemic which entails reimagining Atlantis to stay true to what the world-famous resort is known for while also delivering on new ways in which to travel and experience



Audrey Oswell

Atlantis with safety at the forefront. Oswell has more than 30 years of experience in the hospitality and gaming industries, with almost a decade being in The Bahamas and the Caribbean. Prior to joining Atlantis, she served as the interim CEO/COO for Seneca Gaming, President and COO at Caesars, CEO at Resorts International in Atlantic City and as COO at Fontainebleau in Las Vegas. She received her bachelor's degree from Temple University and her MBA from Drexel University.

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Atlantis Paradise Island ([atlantisbahamas.com](http://atlantisbahamas.com)) is a lush, oceanside resort located on Paradise Island in The Bahamas. A dynamic destination that launched 25 years ago as a first-of-its-kind modern marvel of nature and engineering, Atlantis has embarked on a new chapter tied to a meaningful connection with the ocean, Bahamian culture, and the spirit of the property's beloved team members. The resort's new, immersive programming connects guests to the rich history, art, people, food, and festivities of The Bahamas. Atlantis features five distinct properties, from The Royal, The Beach and The Coral, to the luxury properties The Cove and The Reef. The resort is built around Aquaventure, an innovative, 141-acre waterscape of thrilling slides and river rides, pools, and white sand beaches. Home to the largest open-air marine habitat in the world, over 50,000 marine animals from 250 species make their home in the ocean-fed environments. From unparalleled meeting and convention space to the luxury Atlantis Marina accommodating yachts of up to 220 feet overlooking Marina Village, a Bahamian marketplace, the Atlantis experiences are endless. Other resort amenities include the 30,000-square-foot tranquil Mandara Spa, Atlantis Kids Adventures (AKA) for children ages 3-12, and CRUSH, a

cutting-edge teen club. The award-winning 18-hole Tom Weiskopf designed golf course, renowned Atlantis Casino, and duty-free shopping are complemented by restaurants and lounges with celebrity chef culinary masterpieces including Fish by José Andrés, Nobu by Nobu Matsuhisa, Olives by Todd English and Casa D'Angelo by Angelo Elia. Dolphin Cay, the resort's 14-acre marine mammal habitat, is a state-of-the-art education center and animal-rescue rehabilitation hospital whose first residents were 17

rescue dolphins from Hurricane Katrina. Visitors to Dolphin Cay can participate in creative, non-disruptive "interactions" that build real awareness, stir emotion, and help fund the resort's conservation efforts. Through these guest participations and those offered through Atlantis Marine Adventures, a portion of the cost of each of the on-property interactions goes back to the Atlantis Blue Project Foundation (ABPF), the resort's nonprofit, 501(c)3 organization dedicated to saving sea species and their extraordinary habitats throughout The Bahamas and surrounding Caribbean seas.

**Will you discuss the history and heritage of Atlantis Paradise Island and highlight how the property has evolved?**

In 1994 the renowned hotelier and visionary Sol Kerzner purchased what at the time was Resorts International, a hotel property that was situated on some of the most pristine beaches of The Bahamas. Sol was inspired by the natural beauty of the landscape and the amazing legend of the underwater world Atlantis. Under his design and direction, Sol literally transformed the property into what it continues to be today – a modern marvel of nature and engineering. Atlantis redefined tourism in The Bahamas and beyond.

Over time, the resort expanded and added The Cove, The Reef, Dolphin Cay, restaurants by celebrity chefs, retail outlets, Aquaventure water park, Mandara Spa and Aura nightclub. Today, the resort also offers The Coral and Harborside Resort, with a total of 3,500 rooms across the property. Atlantis features the largest open-air marine habitat in the world where over 50,000 marine animals from 250 species make their home in the ocean-fed environments. Groups and events have access to 500,000 square feet



Atlantis Paradise Island



*Central Beach on the seven-acre Paradise Lagoon which offers snorkeling, paddle boats, and other water sports*

of flexible indoor and outdoor event space. The Atlantis Marina consists of 63 mega-yacht slips, and its marina village offers upscale shopping and dining outlets.

Today, the resort is owned by Brookfield Hospitality and it continues to serve as an icon and pinnacle of hospitality, service and authentic guest experiences. In fact, many of our guests through the course of time have made friends with our team members and return annually, often more than once a year. Our guests have also become attached to our marine life and track their progression over the years. The Bahamian spirit and hospitality are great differentiators, and one of our core brand pillars.

**Will you discuss Atlantis Paradise Island's commitment to the ecology and economy of The Bahamas?**

Atlantis Paradise Island is very committed to supporting and enhancing the ecology and the economy of The Bahamas. Our nonprofit organization, Atlantis Blue Project Foundation, saves rare and endangered sea species and their extraordinary habitats throughout The Bahamas and surrounding Caribbean seas. By funding scientific research, conservation programs and community outreach efforts, the mission is to protect the waters and its vast marine wildlife ensuring that The Bahamas will remain a haven for a one-of-a-kind, rare and endangered species for generations to come. The Foundation receives its funding through guest participation in every one of Atlantis Paradise Island's marine interactions and experiences. Our team of full-time marine biologists, aquarists, veterinarians, lab technicians and water safety specialists work closely with international and local partners to contribute to these important research efforts.

However, our work to support and enhance our local ecology doesn't stop there – our resort is committed to recycling and you'd be surprised at what we accomplish. Atlantis recycles nearly 5,000 gallons of motor oil a

year, plus active battery and tire recycling, and other initiatives that include eliminating single use plastic. Upon arrival, guests receive two keepsake water bottles that they can use during their stay. There are multiple hydration stations available throughout the resort for easy fill-ups.

Education is another key area of our focus. In addition to our educational interactions for all of our marine programs, our team members are often invited for teaching opportunities in local elementary schools and now produce "virtual" field trips to ensure our messaging thrives during these challenging times.

In terms of the economy, Atlantis has operated for over 25 years in The Bahamas and is the largest private employer in the country.

**How has Atlantis Paradise Island adapted its business to address the challenges caused by the global pandemic?**

We adapted to address the challenges caused by the global pandemic in a variety of ways. The first was through our reimagined guest experiences at Dolphin Cay, which are now customized for pods of friends and family traveling together. Other offerings really take advantage of the vast and open landscape the resort offers from private dinners on the beach, movies under the stars and live entertainment programming including Junkanoo in our Marina Village.

The Atlantis Clean & Safe Promise, which was designed under the guidance of the world-renowned Cleveland Clinic, meets both local and international standards for health and safety protocols. Atlantis also offers three on-site locations for COVID-19 testing with same-day results. Additionally, guests receive two complimentary Rapid Antigen return home tests per room.

**How proud are you to see the strength and resilience of Atlantis Paradise Island's workforce during this challenging and uncertain time?**

Words don't do it justice – I am so very proud of our Atlantis family and team members. This year has, to say the least, been a challenge for everyone – personally, economically, psychologically and emotionally. What never ceases to amaze me is how the Bahamian spirit is endless and so robust. It's the culture and the passion of the people that make The Bahamas and visiting Atlantis so undeniably different and special.

**How important is it for Atlantis Paradise Island to bring authentic Bahamian experiences to the resort's guests?**

From the beginning, Atlantis has offered the best of The Bahamas. Atlantis' genuine Bahamian hospitality creates an emotional bond that our customers cherish and return to experience year after year. I love listening to our guests' feedback – often I hear their story about a team member who was thoughtful in an exchange, and the guest was just simply surprised by the genuine care and service. Other times, I hear from guests who are mesmerized learning about our sea life and what they can do to protect our shared environment. These are anecdotal examples of Atlantis' genuine Bahamian hospitality in action, and in turn how the passion translates to lifelong memories for our guests. So indeed, authentic Bahamian experiences are very important, however it's simply natural for our team members to create and share this with our customers.

I think art is a great example too – our guests have access to local art at Atlantis. One of the most beautiful areas at the resort is at the tip of the Cove peninsula where the Sacred Space sculpture series resides. The installation is an interactive exhibit that represents seven dancing women who share the vision of conserving Bahamian culture through their intention of triumph, hope and determination. This piece was produced by The Bahamas' most noted and internationally acclaimed artist, Antonius Roberts. We also showcase art produced by the children of our team members and feature works produced by our team members too – one of my favorite pieces is a massive, outdoor wall mural that is alive in color, shape and form – I pass it every day as I enter the office and it is yet another reminder of the talent, passion and richness that is inherent in the local culture and throughout the destination.

**What advice do you offer young people interested in a career in the hospitality industry?**

The advice I would give is to be open. Be open to learning and know that you can never stop learning. Be open to different opinions, new ideas, taking some risk and in general be open to other people. As in all industries, especially in hospitality, it is helpful to experience many areas of operations and understand how they function and support one another. Always feel confident to ask questions, volunteer to take on new responsibilities, read as much as possible – from current events to industry insights, and learn how to listen. Active listening translates and helps you remain focused and engaged. Effective and efficient communication will support successful leadership and overall achievement. ●